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FBI fishes for spies on D.C. street

*Soviet embassy watch
leads to big catches*

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WASHINGTON—There is a stretch of sidewalk along 16th Street here where FBI surveillance teams, like anglers at a trout stream, have pulled in more than their share of big fish.

Last week Christopher Cooke, a 25-year-old Air Force Titan missile launch officer, was charged with walking down that sidewalk, turning in at 1125 16th St. NW—the Russian embassy—and passing along information. He allegedly betrayed certain Soviet targets of U.S. missiles.

As lawyers argue over how seriously Cooke compromised security and whether his commanding officers improperly offered him immunity from prosecution, at least one old hand at the 16th Street Spy Wars is grumbling that the country still hasn't learned how to handle such cases.

COOKE'S RELATIVES have said he received a promise of immunity from Air Force superiors who were eager to learn just how severely Titan missile secrets had been compromised.

Pentagon officials have confirmed that the Air Force was forced to change targets for certain missile silos because of information the Soviets got in the Cooke case.

W. Donald Stewart, who served as espionage supervisor for the FBI for nine years and who was chief Pentagon investigator for another half decade, recalled these spy dragnets that started on 16th Street and were played out on the global stage:

● In 1963 Stewart's agents, alerted by sources in London, watched Nelson C. Drummond, a Navy yeoman, stroll down 16th Street and turn in at 1125.

EARLIER THAT year he had visited the Soviet embassy in London and made a deal to sell Navy files for \$2,500 apiece in Washington. FBI agents watched him making deliveries which netted him \$24,000 before making the arrest. He was convicted and sentenced to life in prison.

● Air Force Captain George H. French was observed walking nonchalantly down 16th Street in 1957 when he suddenly tossed a newspaper over the embassy fence.

"One of our agents, a guy with arms as long as my whole body," said Stewart, "reached in and grabbed the paper before the Russians could get it."

Inside the paper was an offer to provide data.

FBI AGENTS posing as Russians met with French and ultimately the Air Force officer "sold" them nuclear weapons secrets for \$27,500. French said he needed the money to pay gambling debts. He was convicted and served 10 years in prison.

● In 1968, Naval intelligence officers lured another visitor to 1125 into a room at the nearby Statler Washington Hotel to arrest him.

"The guy got the drop on the Navy guys, cuffed them with their own handcuffs, and took off with their guns. We got him later on the Pennsylvania Turnpike," Stewart said.

This man was never prosecuted because Navy officers offered him immunity, Stewart recalled.

IN ANOTHER CASE, an unnamed Army telecommunications expert made his contact with the Soviets in 1966 in Europe, Stewart said.

"They (the Army) pleaded with him on bended knee to accept immunity, and (when he accepted) they put him back on the street at Fort Dix," Stewart said.

Yet another case involved a Navy lieutenant who passed nuclear weapons data in London. This man then obtained immunity in exchange for disclosing what secrets he had provided the Soviets.

Stewart withheld the names of some past investigative targets because they were never charged.

More recently there have been two others who ran afoul of the law after dropping in on the Russians.

PROBABLY THE MOST unusual case was that of Edwin G. Moore, who walked past the embassy to a nearby staff residence where he tossed a manila folder over the fence in late 1976.

A terrified KGB agent inside the fence thought someone had thrown a bomb and called the fire department. The surveillance squad went in with the firemen and extracted the package.

It contained an offer to sell the identity of CIA agents and other secrets for cold

"Nobody, neither the CIA nor the FBI, was happy about that one," recalled a former top Justice Department official who monitored the case.

IN 1973 A NASHVILLE newspaperwoman, Jacque Srouji, who was on temporary assignment at the Pentagon as a Naval Reserve officer, dropped in at 1125 16th St. and offered to sell data, according to her later statements.

Mrs. Srouji claimed she was working undercover for U.S. intelligence and was paid \$400 by a reputed Soviet KGB officer, Sergi Zaitsev. She also went to dinner with the foreign agent.

It was never determined why Srouji visited the embassy and no charges were ever filed, although the Justice Department and a House committee conducted a lengthy investigation. They took no action, however.

Stewart said that many of the cases focusing on the Soviet embassy illustrate the U.S. government's failure to coordinate its activities.

SOMETIMES, AS in the case of the Navy enlisted man who "got the drop" on Navy investigators, the armed services failed to coordinate moves with other law enforcement agencies.

More troubling is that many cases were never prosecuted because the military, the CIA, and the State Department are anxious to avoid embarrassment and further disclosure of damaging information, by going to court.

In the Cooke case, for example, Justice Department lawyers have acknowledged that when his movements had been traced by the FBI surveillance team through three embassy visits, Navy commanders offered Cooke immunity for telling what he had disclosed to the Soviets.

JUSTICE DEPARTMENT prosecutors indicated they will attempt to "get around" that immunity offer and take the case to court. But they acknowledged that it will complicate their case.

"This problem with immunity comes up too often," said Stewart. "Somebody has got to be in charge of these cases at the White House level. That would prevent people in the military from avoiding embarrassing trials by giving immunity sometimes.

"It would still give us the option to use immunity deals to get information about how bad we have been hurt when that is in the national interest.

"We just can't afford to have the Soviets keep making these inroads while we sit by and watch."